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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002356

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A  
NSC FOR WOOD  
OSD FOR MCGRAW  
CENTCOM FOR CSTC-A, POLAD, CG CJTF-101

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2028

TAGS: MOPS PGOV PREL AF

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND FM SPANTA PLEDGE COOPERATION ON  
ADDRESSING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, for reasons 1.4(a),  
(b) and (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: On August 27, Ambassador and FM Spanta discussed how the USG and GoA could best work together to advance mutual interests following the August 25 Council of Ministers' decision to instruct the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense to negotiate a status of force agreement of international forces. Both agreed the two sides could find solutions, but we had to do so in a rational environment. Both agreed we needed to slow down the process, and work quietly to preserve our respective national interests in our foundation of strong cooperation. Spanta urged the Ambassador to have even more regular and direct contact with Karzai.

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Spanta: Emotional Cabinet meeting  
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2.(C) Spanta characterized the 8/25 cabinet meeting as "very emotional." The majority of the cabinet was angry about the international forces' actions at Shindand and their public statements following the incident. As President Karzai and the ministers drafted the decision language, Spanta proposed formulations he hoped would decrease tensions between the international community and GoA. Karzai and the cabinet rejected them. Spanta characterized the final decision as extremely unfortunate.

3.(C) Spanta described an even more inflamed 8/25 meeting between Karzai and legislators. Approximately 50 MPs, including Speaker Qanooni, Deputy Speaker Yassini and representatives from each of the provinces, attended. Five or six spoke, and all criticized coalition force actions. (Political section has heard separately that Speaker Qanooni did not participate in the criticism).

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USG committed to resolving current situation  
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4.(C) The Ambassador made the following points:

- \* USG takes this issue seriously. High-level USG officials would be meeting this week to discuss this issue.
- \* Preliminary plans for a Bush-Karzai video conference on September 3.
- \* September 25 Strategic Partnership could be best place to start discussions.
- \* USG knows that Spanta has been helpful in addressing Shindand.
- \* Our two governments could find a solution, but we needed to deal with the situation in a rational and not an inflamed environment. We need to slow down.

5.(C) The Ambassador added the US military was investigating the Shindand incident. He pointed out USG's questions over the high number of reported deaths and much lower numbers of injured.

He acknowledged the differences between UNAMA's statement and the ISAF press release. He reaffirmed that the USG took civilian casualties seriously, we would continue to do what we could to reduce civilian casualties, and when we make mistakes we would take responsibility. He stated that a key mutual objective should be to prevent damage to our close military relationship at this critical moment.

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Spanta concern over U.S. statements on Shindand

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6.(C) Spanta welcomed the Ambassador's comments and reiterated his support for the role of US and international military forces in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was a friend of the United States and he was upset over the criticism the United States was receiving. More importantly, the GoA has a national interest in finding a solution: if coalition forces leave Afghanistan, the first losers would be women, advocates of democracy and moderates. Extremists - the Taliban and fundamentalist Islamists - would take over. Spanta saw it as his responsibility to prevent anti-democratic forces from using this issue to undermine our bilateral cooperation.

7.(C) Spanta urged the USG to be prudent in its public declarations in this charged atmosphere. He asked the USG to "reduce the volume" and to discuss security matters in the context of our partnership. The Ambassador concurred that the USG would be thoughtful in its public statements. Spanta explained that Karzai was angry there was such strong evidence of high civilian casualties and yet the Pentagon would issue no apology. Spanta acknowledged that the enemy can manipulate information in these situations. Seeking an independent source, he heard from his sister, a Herat provincial council member, that the civilian casualty numbers were high.

WOOD